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III. SUBSISTENCE

Agriculture

241 [226] Agriculture and fishing are the principal sources of Tukuna economy. If forced to, the Tukuna will go for some time without collecting wild fruits or hunting; but the complete lack of garden products and fish simply spells misery to them.

[462] [476] [462] The garden patch, cleared and burned out of the virgin jungle, is as a rule made exclusively by the men, often in a communal work party, *uajurí;* but some widows, without masculine aid, clear the land and plant in the *capoeira* or secondary jungle growth. Both sexes pile up the rubbish and burn it, whereas planting is carried out exclusively by women and girls. The original instrument for felling trees was [442] the stone ax, whose appearance no one now remembers, but which, according to legend, the culture hero dyoi' stole from the demon toi"ta [tu|"'ta] (see page 131).

The four species of major importance for the Tukuna are bitter manioc, *mandioca brava* (*Manihot utilissima*), sweet manioc, *macaxera* (*M. aipi*),[1] maize, and yam, *cará* (*Dioscorea* sp.).[2] Lacking any one of these four, the Tukuna have a bad time of it, whereas the absence of other edible tubers, such as the sweet potato, and of other plants like sugar cane, pineapple, peanut (*manduví*),[3] and so on, affects them very little.

[773] According to legend, a solitary old woman discovered both the tree which furnished macaxera-like fruits and the art of making manioc flat cakes, beijús. On learning the secret, the men felled the tree and ate up everything; only Deer kept shoots and seeds in a basket (vatu') of which the culture hero dyoi' later robbed him (see p. 131). For this reason the Tukuna refer to a cultivated plant as a pre-Columbian possession by saying that "it first came in Deer's vatu'."

[777] Formerly, only sweet manioc was known to them; apparently bitter manioc and the process of making manioc flour were introduced by the Neobrazilians.

[442] In planting either variety of manioc, a woman goes ahead, armed with a long, heavy, rounded stake of wood with a sharpened point (about 140 cm. by 7 cm.), with which she makes holes in the ground, a female companion trailing behind to insert the plant slips into the prepared soil. This stake (paye'|"à), when not in use, is kept under water near the entrance to the house or clearing, so that it will not dry out and lose weight. It is removed and dried off only on the eve of planting.

243 [773] Maize was not "in Deer's vatu'" but, according to legend, was given to the Indians by aria'na, a great coquette of the upper world, who brought it with her from one of the lower worlds, where she was once forced to sojourn against her will. (See p. 112.)

[462] The planting of maize, done preferably by men, is accompanied by a certain ceremoniousness that is not observed for any of the other plants. The kernels are placed first of all in a gourd of water. The planter then takes a little of this water in his mouth and sprays it over the kernels in order to make them more savory.

243 784 Until the plants reach a certain height he must submit to rigorous taboos. He cannot go near the fire, or eat or even touch the following fish: pirarueú (*Arapaima*

[1] Commonly known in Brazil as *aipi*.—Trans.
[2] A tuber also known as *inhame*.—Trans.
[3] *Arachis hypogaea;* commonly known as *amendoim;* T., tö"tl.

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announces his coming by the sound of his paddling, the strokes of which can be heard from afar. He then draws his canoe inshore but remains seated in it for about half an hour, without glancing at the house, while the host pays him not the slightest attention. Only later do visitor and host approach each other, the former bringing his baggage to the house, in which there is always enough room for him to be lodged without the slightest inconvenience to the inmates.

Formerly, the guest was accorded a type of martial reception, which Mareoy describes. When a visitor entered a house, all the men present seized their spears, pointing them toward the newcomer and pretending to bar the way. The guest, however, knowing the meaning of this procedure, pushed the weapons aside with his hands, entered, and seated himself in the first hammock. The owner of the house then asked: "Who art thou? Friend or enemy? Whence comest thou? What dost thou wish?" The answer was easily given, since the visitor had only come to trade and so forth. They say that in Peru this form of reception is still practiced.

The visit customarily lasts several days or even weeks, but does not grow burdensome to the host, since the guests bring all they need with which to provide their own food by hunting or fishing. More often than not, the owner of the house shares his meals with the visitors, who do likewise with the host's family.

Festivals

Gatherings by special invitation to selected individuals have much more social and economic importance than personal visits have, whether these guests are invited to participate in collective tasks of major importance—clearing a plantation, preparing house thatch, making preparations for great feasts, such as the puberty feast—or to take part in one of the ceremonies of painting and name bestowal, hair plucking and perforation of ears and septum, haircutting, change of voice in youths, first menstruation, or some similar occasion. We have already noted (p. 13) that the thatch trimming of a new house is also carried out with festivities.

Labor festivals.—There is a large class of ceremonies for which the guests arrive in the morning, receive a meal and gourds of drink from the hosts, then all go out together to work. That night they drink, dance, and sing until the following day. These gatherings, which are entirely profane, are called *vayuri'* (uajurí, ajurí) or pë'ta. The first of these terms, vayuri', is an alteration of the Portuguese word for assistance, *ajuda*, which passed into the lingua geral to designate these gatherings for communal work without payment; the second, pë'ta, is the Portuguese word for party, *festa*, pronounced in the Tukuna manner. This suggests that the Tukuna did not have this institution before contact with the Neobrazilians, among whom it is in great vogue; but one must also consider the possibility that it was already known by the Tukuna, who only adopted the present form and the Portuguese terminology.

Rites of passage.—The rites of passage have, however, a religious basis and are great ceremonies; the generic designation is dyɛ̈ɨ'. Sometimes more than three hundred persons are present at these, and the celebration with its concomitant drinking lasts for three days and three nights. The vayuri' as well as the dyɛ̈ɨ', are above all drinking bouts, not banquets.

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881 c) A girl was in seclusion; a feast was about to be celebrated. Aside from her, there was no one
in the house. In the kitchen there lay beneath a cover on the platform (giráu) all the smoked
773 game for the feast. Suddenly, through a crack in the wall of her room, the vərẽkʲ observed a
539 smoked monkey descend from the platform. Seizing a blowgun, it began to dance with this up
and down the kitchen. Then a roasted sloth also clambered down, going first to the fireplace to
warm itself, then it searched for the rattle stick, which was already prepared for the feast, and
in its turn began to dance to and fro. After some time both returned to the platform.

As soon as her mother returned to the house, the vərẽkʲ told her what she had seen. The mother
went to the smoked meat on the platform, examined the sloth, and, seeing that it was dirty with
ashes, believed what her daughter had told her. "Nothing like this has ever happened before; I
believe that you are going to die!" she said to her daughter. And sure enough, the following
morning the girl lay dead in her seclusion room.

342 Formerly, a small room, na-piⁿiⁿ (pl. 11, *a*) was made for the girl as soon as
881 possible, against the east wall of the house if she belonged to moiety A, against
[616] the west wall if she belonged to moiety B. This little retreat was circular, two
meters in diameter or a little more, and had no floor, since the vərẽkʲ sleeps in her
hammock throughout her seclusion. The walls are made of long, white strips of
burity, tied with cipó firmly together in horizontal bands. These extend from the
floor to the roof thatch, where their tips are bent toward the front. On the left side
(looking at the room) there is a door, closed by a kind of hanging mat made from
[285] burity frondstalks set in a horizontal position and held firm by two vertical rods.
Often today the seclusion room is square and is not erected where it should be,
because the position of the house on the banks of the Solimões or igapó does not
permit it. In general, to make such a room, people are called together for a work
[476] party (uajurí) to which, above all, members of the clans of the vərẽkʲ's moiety are
invited.

881 *Preparations for the feast.*—The preparations for the feast which now begins
may take more than two months, sometimes requiring even one or two more work
parties. Nowadays, what really delays completion of the preparations is the diffi-
culty of collecting a sufficient quantity of smoked game for the number of guests;
[136] game is now rare in the country (p. 26), and even fish are not caught easily.

The game is roasted on a forked grill, first in the jungle and later in the kitchen,
[252] where it is then stored on its own large, covered platform. When the last pieces
arrive, the first are already desiccated to the point where they more or less re-
semble charred wood. At the same time, the women prepare alcoholic drinks, of
[273] which a sufficient quantity is required not only for the feast itself but also for the
preliminary work party. In the meantime the date of the celebration must be
calculated, so that the invitations may be issued.

881 *Invitations.*—Two invitations are given for any celebration: the first advising
574 of the approximate time with relation to the phase of the moon ("in the first full
moon"), the other fixing the exact day that the ceremony begins. Feasts are pre-
ferably held during the full moon, not because any magical influence is attributed
to it but simply because it is much more agreeable to have the house and yard of
the ceremony flooded with moonlight than plunged in darkness.

881 Invitations are delivered personally by the host, that is, by the vərẽkʲ's father
574 or by a person especially charged by him. The messenger travels from house to
202 house informing the residents that the celebration is drawing near and that the